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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANTANANARIVO 000113

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TAGS: [MA](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: STALLED DIALOGUE (CON'T)

Classified By: Ambassador Niels Marquardt for reasons 1.4 d and e

¶1. (C) Summary: A dangerous game of cat-and-mouse over launching dialogue between President and Mayor continues here, with each side professing its willingness to meet immediately -- and yet no meeting taking place. SADC "Troika" ministers were here today to see both sides, and the President also received the FFKM Church Council; he told both sides he was "ready today" to meet the Mayor -- as long as the Mayor suspended all demonstrations while dialogue took place. Just as occurred on Tuesday and Wednesday, the Mayor got the message too late, after he had already told his loyalists on the public square to move toward ministries for another sit-in -- or worse. Poor communications among the main Malagasy actors -- President, Mayor, and Church -- are preventing real-time agreement on constructive next steps -- while providing convenient fig leaves behind which both side can hide as it constantly recalculates its relative position. Nonetheless, real-world pressures are mounting on both sides to talk: demonstrations slated to start in the provinces may be beyond the control of either protagonist, and the military's stated willingness to "fulfill its duties" is another factor pushing them together. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ravalomanana asked me on Tuesday morning to "get the Mayor to agree to dialogue and to suspend demonstrations while we talk." I relayed the message to the Mayor on Wednesday morning, when he explained that he had been busy on Tuesday running his demonstrations and thus could not answer or return calls. The Mayor agreed to immediate dialogue with the President and to "send my people home" from the public square. When I sought to relay this message back to the President, it was his turn to be unreachable, not just to me but also to his key ministers. He left Tana unexpectedly on Wednesday morning for an overnight trip to Antsirabe with the recently-appointed Army Chief, and returned this morning. (Presumably his mission was to get closer to him and other top brass and prevent, or at least delay, the military's stated willingness to intervene.) While the President may have decided rationally that the Antsirabe mission had priority yesterday, it appeared to me that he had re-calculated (yet again) and decided that dialogue was not timely yesterday. The Mayor, on the other hand, seemed to have reached the opposite conclusion.

¶3. (C) Foreign Minister Ranjeva told me this morning after meeting the President and relaying my message that the President was indeed open to dialogue, as long as demonstrations would be suspended. However, the President did not offer a precise time for the dialogue, which was what the Mayor was looking for when I relayed the message back to him. Another game of cat-and-mouse telephone-tag ensued, this time involving both the visiting SADC "Troika" and the FFKM Church Council, both of which had meetings this morning with the President and reportedly passed to him the Mayor's willingness both to meet and to suspend demonstrations as soon as he had a firm appointment. As I write this, there

may/may be a firm appointment in the works, but the FFKM -- who would be the likely organizer of the event -- is guarding its information tightly. Over 10,000 demonstrators, who evidently were not asked by the Mayor to go home, are currently (1600) engaged in an uneasy physical stand-off with the military at various ministries in the Anosy area of town.

¶4. (C) Meanwhile, pressures for dialogue mount, in a useful (but dangerous) way. Six cotier opposition leaders called on me this morning to say that demonstrations will start today in Tamatave and spread to other provincial cities like Tuléar. While they said they support TGV (for now), they repeated that the "problems are national" and cannot be solved by a bilateral dialogue between the two Merina leaders. Indeed, TGV told me yesterday that one of the factors pushing him to dialogue now was his perception that provincial disturbances would be entirely beyond his ability to control -- and are imminent. He also mentioned the recent military statements as a second reason to act now.

¶5. (C) Looking at what comes next, it is unlikely that the failure to meet so far is exclusively or mainly due to poor communications. This is a factor as the Malagasy refuse to speak directly with one another and insist on inefficient message-passing through third parties which means that critical opportunities have been missed repeatedly. However, a more critical factor is that each side is constantly re-evaluating its position vis-a-vis the other, and these changing calculations continually alter their position on the wisdom or necessity of dialogue. TGV seems genuine in his (current) desire for talks. The President continues to have many reasons to think he can outlast TGV, but the daily confrontation in the streets brings huge risk of renewed bloodshed. His time spent yesterday bonding with his new CHOD may or may not have convinced him that he needs to act more quickly. In any case, what has been missing is a clear demonstration of presidential leadership: an unambiguous signal not just of a general willingness to meet, but a concrete, public offer of a specific time and place for it to happen. We will push in the next 24 hours for that missing element.

MARQUARDT